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SW 400.01: Social Work Research

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**Social Work Research
SW 400
Fall, 2008**

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"To a student, the term research is often scary. It is usually associated with a form of scientific inquiry that relates to the physical sciences. However, research is part of everything we do. It is a thought process we use to solve problems, a method of inquiry that helps us build knowledge. In essence, research is a scientific process we use in every aspect of our lives." ----- Bruce Friedman

Introduction:

Becoming a competent social worker requires learning about research methods to enhance knowledge and practice. Human beings are naturally curious about themselves, others and their environments. In this sense, we are born researchers. The primary intention of this course, besides learning about how to do research and how to evaluate its efforts, is to help us reconnect with our inquisitive spirit and find inspiration and excitement in research processes. Social work research takes many shapes and forms. We will learn about a variety of approaches to research and their strengths and limitations. Social workers use and apply the principles of social research to evaluate their practice; determine the effectiveness of their programs and policies; assess group, organizational, and community needs and assets; evaluate the individual change process using single-subject design, and advocate for and take action to promote community and social change. This learning allows the social workers not only to understand the literature that they encounter in professional practice but to also make effective contributions to the practice field through helpful participation in conducting research.

Course Description:

This course is designed to develop students' ability to design and conduct research within the ethical constraints and considerations of human research and to understand the results of empirical research presented in professional journals. Students will learn the history of social research and its purpose. Students will become familiar with different perspectives on and methods of social research and explore the possibilities for mixed methods research. We will critically engage with the basic tenets of qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods and investigate the interplay of these approaches with the underlying ethics, values (human diversity, social justice, self-determination, and equality) and principles of the social work profession. This analysis will provide a framework for assessing various research designs, their methodologies, results and implications. Studies drawn from the field of social work will be used to illustrate selected research methodology and provide students with the opportunity to

critique them.

Students will be introduced to a variety of research methods that will include oral history, participant observation, community-based participatory research, case study, ethnography, qualitative and quantitative program evaluations, and experimental and quasi-experimental designs. The course promotes the vision of research as an integral component of ethically informed social work practice and challenges students to understand the research role as one in which all the roles of social work can manifest themselves.

Program Objectives Related to the Course

PO 1 Apply critical thinking skills within the context of professional social work practice

PO 2 Understand the value base of the profession and its ethical standards and principles, and practice accordingly

PO 3 Understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and apply strategies of advocacy and social change that advance social and economic justice

PO 4 Practice without discrimination and with respect, knowledge and skills related to client's age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, marital status, national origin, race, sex and sexual orientation

PO 5 Demonstrate understanding of the history of the social work profession and its contemporary structures and issues

PO 6 Apply the knowledge and skills of generalist social work practice with systems of all sizes, while exhibiting effective practice in a range of professional social work roles

PO 9 Demonstrate basic research skills of ethical collection and analysis of data, evaluation of research studies, application of research findings to practice, and evaluation of one's own practice interventions

PO 10 Use communication skills differently across populations, colleagues, organizational settings and communities.

Course Objectives

The student will meet the following course objectives:

1. Understand the early history of social work research and the historical connection between researcher and social work practitioner.
2. Discuss how unquestioned assumptions about human diversity, which include issues concerning gender, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation, can cause biases in question formulation, research design, measurement, sampling, analysis, and results.
3. Understand the ethical considerations and processes for protecting human subjects.
4. Identify and discuss a variety of methodological approaches to research, such as case studies, experimental, participatory, needs assessment and so on.
5. Read, interpret, and analyze research journal articles based on their consideration of the underlying values, ethics, and principles of the social work profession.
6. Identify basic steps of the generalist practice model and their connections to scientific inquiry.
7. Describe how research findings can contribute to social work's knowledge base and the development of programs and service that promote social justice in society.

8. Demonstrate a working knowledge of data analysis for qualitative and quantitative methodologies and the skills necessary to complete the process.

Required Text:

Dudley, James, R. (2005). *Research methods for social work: Becoming consumers and producers of research*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

1. Integrating Practice/Research Exercises (30%)

Students will have several opportunities to engage in limited direct research, research planning, and research evaluation/critiquing projects. These efforts are designed to assist the student in applying what they are learning through the text, lectures, and class discussion to real research.

Throughout the course in groups and individually, students will engage in evaluation of research articles. **Two** of these evaluations will be completed for a grade. In addition, students will complete an evaluation of their practice; a hand-out describing the expectations will be distributed in class.

2. Midterm (15%)

There will be a midterm test. It will consist of matching, true and false, multiple choice and short-answer essay questions. The midterm will cover course reading (major concepts and key terms) and class discussion. Study guides will be distributed to assist students in focusing their studies.

3. Online Ethics Course (5%)

The UM requires all students who participate in a research project to complete an on-line course on protection of human subjects by the University's Institutional Review Board. The Board is responsible for ensuring that students and faculty adhere to ethical research practices to ensure the protections of human subjects. Below are the directions for how to access the on-line course which you must complete to receive your certifications due by Sept. 18th.

Two ways to access IRB website to complete certification:

A. Short cut – <http://www.umt.edu/research/irb.htm> (even if you choose this one, read instructions below)

B. Long cut –

1. Get to University of Montana homepage
2. Click on “research”
3. Under “Key Links” click on Research Policies and Procedures
4. On left hand menu, click on IRB
5. Click on Overview
6. Click Option 2 – The University of Montana: Online Research Ethics Course.
7. Complete Sections One, Section Two and Section Six
8. Complete Part 1 and Part VI to receive certificates.

4. Research Project (30%)

Students will complete a qualitative/quantitative research project focusing on an area of practice interest. A handout with detailed instructions will be distributed in class.

5. Final Exam (20%)

The final examination will entail an evaluation of a qualitative/quantitative research article in addition to matching, true and false, multiple choice and short-answer essay questions. A study guide will be distributed prior to the final examination.

Determination of Course Grade:

Research Article Critiques (2)	20%
Evaluation of Practice	10%
Online Ethics Course	5%
Research Project	30%
Midterm	15%
Final Exam	20%
Total:	100%

<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Final Grade</u>
95-100	A
94-90	A-
89-87	B+
86-84	B
83-80	B-
79-77	C+
76-74	C
73-70	C-
69-67	D+
66-65	D
< 65	F

Grading Criteria: The ease with which I can understand your work has a positive effect on your grade. All papers submitted for this class are required to be in APA format. In addition for all written assignments, I use the following criteria for grading:

- Correct grammar, spelling and punctuation
- Indications of thoughtfulness and critical reflection
- Thoroughness and attention to detail
- Well organized (use of headings, subheading and clarity of thought)
- Push beyond surface content to interpretation, analysis, and original ideas
- Make connections to class readings, discussion and illustrate these in your written work

Policy on Incompletes and Late Assignments:

Papers and homework assignments are expected to be turned in on the date specified in the syllabus. Any issue preventing timely submission should be discussed before hand with the instructor so that a mutual agreement can be worked out. Late papers and course grades of incomplete are strongly discouraged and will adversely affect the student's grade.

Policy on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities that affect their participation in the course must notify the instructor at the start of the semester if they wish to have special accommodations in instructional and/or examination structure and format.

Participation and Attendance:

The class will be participating in several hands-on exercises to help facilitate learning of key concepts, including group projects focused on analyzing research articles. Attendance is important for maximum student benefit. The grade will be based upon attendance and readiness to participate (including; covering readings in advance of class and having materials in hand for group projects as assigned). Note: missing more than 3 classes will result in the student losing one grade level in the class.

Course Outline and Assignments: (Subject to change)

Class:	Class Discussion and Lecture Topics	Assignments and Readings
Aug 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Course Introduction• Course Content and Expectations• What is Research? Why do It?	
Aug 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Practitioner/Researcher• Different Ways of Knowing• Early History of Social Work Research	Dudley – Ch.1 – Why Social Workers Need Research
Sept 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overview of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches to Research• Research Possibilities Social Work Roles and Research	Dudley - Ch.2- Philosophies and Perspectives about Research Dudley
Sept 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Human Diversity, Ethics and IRB• Literature Review – The Hows and Whys	Dudley – Ch. 3 – Research Ethics and Social Work's Mandates
Sept 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Library Field Trip – How to Conduct a Literature Review• Choosing a Research Topic• IRB Certificate Due	Dudley - Ch. 4 – Understanding the Research Topic **Complete IRB certification and copy certificate**

Sept 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defining Concepts and Measurement Levels of Measurement Reliability and Validity 	Dudley – Ch. 5 – Defining and Measuring Concepts
Sept 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing a Research Study Generating Hypotheses Article Critique #1 Due 	Dudley - Ch. 6 – Focusing a Research Study Article Critique #1 Due
Sept 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring Causal Relationships Group Designs Single System Designs 	Dudley – Ch. 7 – Designing the Study
Sept 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sampling Techniques Selecting a sample 	Dudley - Ch. 8 – Considering Sampling Techniques
Sept 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constructing a Survey 	Dudley - Ch. 9 – Constructing Surveys
Sept 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducting Observational Studies Advantages and Disadvantages Ethical Issues 	Dudley - Ch. 10 – Constructing Observational Studies
Oct 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of Observations in Social Work Settings Review for Mid-term 	Dudley - Ch. 10 – cont.
Oct 7	***MID-TERM TEST***	Mid – Term Test
Oct 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Mid-term results Relevance of Causal Relationships in Social Work Practice 	Dudley - Ch. 11- Exploring Causal Relationships
Oct 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group Designs Single System Designs Article Critique #2 Due 	Dudley - Ch. 11- cont. Article Critique #2 Due
Oct 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differences in Collecting Data Preparation for Data Collection Collecting the Data and the Consumer Role 	Dudley - Ch. 12 – Collecting the Data
Oct 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data Analysis Planning for Data Analysis 	Dudley - Ch. 13 – Analyzing the Data
Oct 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative versus Qualitative Data Analysis 	Dudley - Ch. 13 – cont.
Oct 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative Data Analysis Computer Lab, SPSS, EXCEL Evaluation of Practice Paper Due 	Dudley - Ch. 14 – Quantitative Data Analysis Evaluation of Practice Paper Due
Oct 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative Data Analysis Computer Lab, SPSS, EXCEL 	Dudley - Ch. 14- cont.
Nov 4	No Class – Election Day –VOTE!	

Nov 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative Data Analysis 	Dudley – Ch. 15 – Qualitative Data Analysis
Nov 11	No Class –Veterans’ Day	
Nov 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding 	Dudley - Ch. 15 – cont.
Nov 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program Evaluation 	
Nov 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing the Report 	Dudley – Ch. 16 – Preparing the Report
Nov 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making Charts, Tables 	Dudley - Ch. 16 – cont.
Nov 27	No Class – Thanksgiving Day	
Dec 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share Research Findings 	Student Presentations
Dec 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share Research Findings • Review for Final Exam Research Project Due	Student Presentations Research Project Due
Dec 8	FINAL at 10:10 – 12:10	Final Exam